

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES



Published by Dana Stahlman Raleigh, North Carolina Email:
stahlmanapiaries@aol.com

Published free as a public service to anyone interested in honeybees. Email me to be added to my mailing list. Published 10-5-24

A touch of Irish Hospitality

I have learned that I don't know as much about keeping bees as one would expect. Judi and I visited the county of Galway in Ireland this past week. Any of you who live in the U.S. most likely are thinking Langstroth is the father of Modern Beekeeping. His impact on the Irish and British world of beekeeping is important because of one thing: "The bee space" which he is given credit for observing and writing about it first. The hives used in Ireland are for the most part square and the terms used to describe hive parts are different. For example: A top cover is referred to as a roof, the inner cover is a crown board, the boxes are identified as brood boxes or honey boxes, the bottom board is a floor, and the hive stand is the stand occupied by a single hive. The fence around the apiary keeps sheep out.



This is a typical Irish beeyard. One cannot imagine seeing something like this from a tour bus. It is a county of old history and what stands out is the lack of fields of corn, cotton, soybeans and large farm equipment. Farms are small and all of them are surrounded by stone fences - hundreds to thousands years old. Livestock is the means of making a farm living in this part of Ireland.

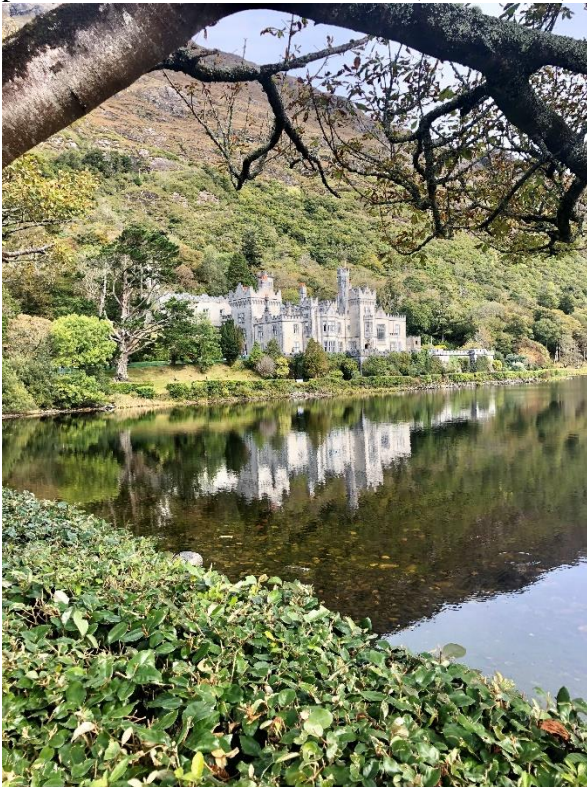
There is so much I would like to share with you about the meadows and farm fields but honeybees is the story line.

Most bees are not kept in towns and villages. Housing is compact and I mean compact. The heritage of Ireland is everywhere from fields surrounded by stone fences centuries old to finding a place to live. A planning authority must give permission for any development and unlike our country, in Ireland a property might be protected because it has bats in its attic or has sat there for a 100 years. Thus roads are very narrow and shrubs grow right up to the road just inches away from passing cars. To get an idea of the vast sources of available food for bees, take a look at a picture I took from the airplane. The land you see here is owned by families passed from generation to generation. The Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Marine life has adopted a



policy of developing an organic agri-food sector. Thus chemicals are clearly on the outs. Why so many green areas in this picture? Cows, horses, pigs and sheep are raised in this area. And from what I was able to learn, most beeyards are small and kept well away from the public. A beekeeper I visited in County Galway lived in a house with very close neighbors. He explained he kept his bees out on the burrens. He sold honey and supplemented his living by catching swarms – a lot of them he said. His hives totaled 30 kept in two locations. I learned from him that Ireland has a code of conduct for beekeepers. You just can't place bee hives anywhere. Bees must be placed away from the public

where they are likely to cause nuisance to neighbors or those in the vicinity to ensure the public cannot easily access them. Apiaries must be stock proof. I guess it means that they cannot be placed close to where livestock (bloodstock) is worked, trained or exercised.



I visited Kylemore Abbey run by the Benedictine nuns of Ypres. The nuns have their own apiary and earn a good amount of money from honey sales and bee pottery in addition to being a tourist destination.

They are very friendly and proper people. Their bees on the other hand are fairly aggressive as I found out. Many beekeepers in Galway County on the western side of the Irish Republic prefer black bees. These black bees are *Aphis mellifera mellifera* although not exactly pure because some beekeepers keep yellow bees (Italian). If you want to get into a good argument in this area of Ireland, move a hive of yellow bees into one of their territories. I don't have the space to discuss the Isle of Wright Disease of the early 1900's which resulted in the death of many of England's native bees, but these beekeepers find this bee to have advantages other than its vulnerability to disease. It's disadvantage is it is not exactly a

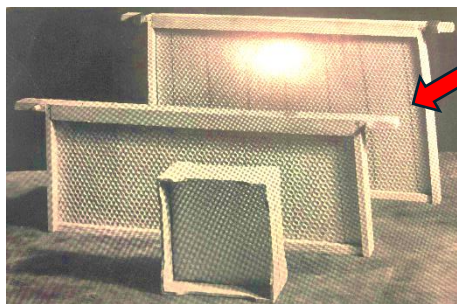
friendly bee. Beekeepers dress appropriately when working this race of honeybees. I learned that it is preferred by about 90% of Irish beekeepers in this region. One of the best reasons is its willingness to work when weather conditions are poor and it caps honey cells. If you know anything thing about this area of Ireland, it rains a lot and it is rare to have a long warm season. Varroa mites are an issue. I was asked how U.S. beekeepers treat for mites. I shared a number of ways we treat for mites but that didn't seem to go over well.

One beekeeper, Arun Lobidhas, shared with me how he manages his bees so that varroa is not killing his bees. Again, this most likely would not be well accepted by U.S. beekeepers because it is very labor intensive and costly. During his honey flow season (mid summer for us) he removes full frames of capped brood – (both worker and drone brood) and **burns them**. He replaces frames with new wax foundation frames for the bees to draw comb and the queen begins to lay eggs. He indicated that since the foraging bees are the only bees that leave the hive and gather honey, the amount of honey collected by the hive is not affected by removing the capped frames of brood. The queen is caged and isolated within the hive. (This cage holds 3 or 4 frames of new foundation) This he explained would produce the winter bees needed by the hive for survival.

Keep in mind that brood raised during the honey flow mature and eat honey stores after the honey flow is over. New wax comb is built because a honey flow encourages comb building. Varroa mites in capped cells multiply and constitute the largest population of mites in a colony. Burning the old comb is a benefit to the health of the colony. Thus, disease and mites became less of a problem and his hives always had good clean comb.

My mind had a tough time getting around this burning of frames and brood. I have never done that except when I faced an AFB disease issue. But it works for him and it gave me something to think about.

I would like to comment on the hives they use. It would be similar to what is called a garden hive in the U.S. Those pretty “A” shaped roofs that allow water to fall off the hives can be purchased in the U.S. as well. However the outside measurements are not that important. It is the inside measurements that count. The hive uses frames but these frames have lugs. Lugs are extensions to the top bar. The hives I observed were well insulated with a chamfered inner wall and frames were placed parallel to the front entrance. I was not familiar with lugs. This is what makes Irish hives different from the Langstroth frames we use.



Note the lugs on the frames shown here.

Due to cold rainy weather when I visited, I did not get a chance to see an open hive of bees. I did see bees and hives from the distance and I got close enough to get stung by a bee at the Abbey. I had a chance to talk and visit beekeepers but not go to their bees because the beekeepers here generally have what are called out yards. Aran, for example, indicated that he has harvested his honey, managed his

hives for winter and will not be attending to them until spring. For me it was like stepping back to the 1950's and 60's. It is now the time to study for Aran, take classes, and work toward being able to take the test required to teach beekeeping to Level 1 students. He has to accumulate all kinds of records over a five year period just to reach Level 3.

There are many levels of rank in the beekeeping world in Ireland - starting at Beginning level 1 to level 7 Irish Honey Judge. The chart below will give some idea of the education and levels of what beekeepers in Ireland face if they want to be considered accomplished keepers of bees.

